

TRIENNIAL LONG BEACH AIRPORT DISASTER DRILL

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On Friday, April 24, 2015, the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) participated in the Triennial Full Scale Emergency Exercise at the Long Beach Airport with other county departments and agencies. The drill ran from 8:00PM to midnight.

The purpose of this exercise was to provide emergency responders an opportunity to work with other key airport and local emergency responders, and test how all agencies work together and organize a unified response to an airport emergency. The Emergency Outreach Bureau- Disaster Services Unit deployed the Department's Long Beach Airport Strike Team. This was an opportunity to meet partnering agencies, familiarize themselves with the airport and to practice their crisis counseling skills in an airport setting with family and friends of crash victims.

The emergency exercise involved an explosion between two parked aircraft on the tarmac and two potential secondary explosive devices in two terminals. Strike Team members were deployed to the Family Assistance Center, while the other half was in the Reception Area, providing crisis counseling to the passengers that were not physically injured. Members were asked to assist in JetBlue's Family Assistance Center.

The volunteers acting as family members were presented with a myriad of issues. There was a woman rocking back and forth in an almost catatonic state, repeating over and over again, "I just want my sister" – who was a passenger in one of the planes adjacent to the explosion. There was a man suffering from heart-related issues and another going into diabetic shock from lack of insulin. The crowd of passengers' family was well acted out and kept the Strike Team busy and fully engaged. In the Reception



Area, members assisted uninjured passengers who wanted to reunite with their families. Unfortunately, the group had to evacuate twice due to a potential secondary device scenario.

At the end of the exercise, the author walked into the room where JetBlue was conducting its debrief and about 30 JetBlue staff clapped and exclaimed, “We want to thank all your people in purple for their amazing work and we look forward to working with your team. You were all great!” The “purple people” were the Strike Team members in their LACDMH Emergency Response Team jackets.

Great job, Long Beach Airport Strike Team!

